

ECONOMIC HIT MEN AND THE GLOBAL CORPORATOCRACY

Having once helped to overthrow Third World leaders for the sake of corporate profits, John Perkins now campaigns to convince corporations to become economically, socially and environmentally responsible.

Interview with John Perkins
by Amy Goodman

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THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

John Perkins worked from 1971 to 1981 for the international consulting firm of Chas T. Main, where he was a self-confessed "economic hit man". Amy Goodman interviewed him on 5 June for the radio/TV news program *Democracy Now!*, and following is an edited transcript. — Editor.

Amy Goodman (AG): Hundreds of thousands of protesters are gathering in Germany ahead of tomorrow's [6 June's] G8 meeting of the world's richest nations. The three-day summit is being held in the coastal resort of Heiligendamm. German police have spent US\$18 million to erect an 12-kilometre-long, two-metre-high fence around the meeting site. Global warming will be high on the agenda. Going into the meeting, President Bush has proposed to sideline the UN-backed Kyoto accords and set voluntary targets on reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. Other top issues will include foreign aid and new trade deals.

Today, we spend the hour with a man who claims to have worked deep inside the forces driving corporate globalisation. In his first book, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, John Perkins told the story of his work as a highly paid consultant hired to strong-arm leaders into creating policy favourable to the US government and corporations, what he calls the "corporatocracy". John Perkins says he helped the US cheat poor countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars by lending them more money than they could possibly repay and then taking over their economies. John Perkins has just come out with his second book on this issue. It's called *The Secret History of the American Empire: Economic Hit Men, Jackals, and the Truth about Global Corruption*. John Perkins joins us now in the firehouse studio. Welcome to *Democracy Now!*

John Perkins (JP): Thank you, Amy. It's great to be here.

AG: Well, before we go further, "economic hit men": for those who haven't heard you describe this, let alone describe yourself as this, what do you mean?

JP: Well, really, I think it's fair to say that since World War II, we economic hit men have managed to create the world's first truly global empire, and we've done it primarily without the military, unlike other empires in history. We've done it through economics very subtly.

We work many different ways, but perhaps the most common one is that we will identify a Third World country that has resources our corporations covet, such as oil, and then we arrange a huge loan to that country from the World Bank or one of its sister organisations. The money never actually goes to the country. It goes instead to US corporations, who build big infrastructure projects—power grids, industrial parks, harbours, highways—things that benefit a few very rich people but do not reach the poor at all. The poor aren't connected to the power grids. They don't have the skills to get jobs in industrial parks. But they and the whole country are left holding this huge debt, and it's such a big debt that the country can't possibly repay it. So at some point in time, we economic hit men go back to the country and say: "Look, you know, you owe us a lot of money. You can't pay your debt, so you've got to give us a pound of flesh."

AG: Explain your history. What made you an economic hit man?

JP: Well, when I graduated from business school at Boston University, I was recruited by the National Security Agency, the nation's largest and perhaps most secretive spy organisation.

AG: People sometimes think the CIA is that, but the NSA is many times larger.

JP: Yeah, it is larger. It's much larger. At least it was in those days. And it's very, very secretive. There's a lot of rumours. We know quite a lot about the CIA, I think, but we know

very, very little about the NSA. It claims to work only in cryptography, encoding and decoding messages, but in fact we all know that they're the people who have been listening in on our telephone conversations. That's come out recently. And they're a very, very secretive organisation.

They put me through a series of tests, very extensive tests, lie detector tests, psychological tests, during my last year in college. And I think it's fair to say that they identified me as a good potential economic hit man. They also identified a number of weaknesses in my character that would make it relatively easy for them to hook me, to bring me in. And I think those weaknesses I [inaudible] might call the three big drugs of our culture: money, power and sex. Who amongst us doesn't have one of them? I had all three at the time.

And then I joined the Peace Corps. I was encouraged to do that by the National Security Agency. I spent three years in Ecuador living with indigenous people in the Amazon and the Andes, people who today and at that time were beginning to fight the oil companies. In fact, the largest environmental lawsuit in the history of the world has just been brought by these people against Texaco, Chevron. And that was incredibly good training for what I was to do.

And then, while I was still in the Peace Corps, I was brought in and recruited into a US private corporation called Charles T. Main, a consulting firm out of Boston of about 2,000 employees, a very low-profile firm that did a tremendous amount of work of what I came to understand was the work of economic hit men, as I described it earlier, and that's the role I began to fulfil and eventually I kind of rose to the top of that organisation as its chief economist.

AG: And how did that tie to the NSA? Was there a connection?

JP: You know, what's very interesting about this whole system, Amy, is that there's no direct connection. The NSA had interviewed me, identified me and then essentially turned me over to this private corporation. It's a very subtle and very smart system, whereby it's the private industry that goes out and does this work. So if we're caught doing something, if we're caught bribing or corrupting local officials in some country, it's blamed on private industry, not on the US government.

And it's interesting that in the few instances when economic hit men fail, what we call "the jackals", who are people who come in to overthrow governments or assassinate their leaders, also come out of private industry. These are not CIA employees. We all have this image of the 007, the government agent hired to kill, you know, with licence to kill, but these days the government agents, in my experience, don't do that. It's done by private consultants that are brought in to do this work. And I've known a number of these individuals personally and still do.

AG: In your book *The Secret History of the American Empire*, you talk about taking on global power at every level. Right now, we're seeing these mass protests taking place in Germany ahead of the G8 meeting. Talk about the significance of these.

JP: Well, I think it's extremely significant. Something is happening in the world today, which is very, very important. Yeah, as we watched the headlines this morning...what we can absolutely say is we live in a very dangerous world. It's also a very small world, where we're able to know immediately what's going on in Germany or in the middle of the Amazon or anywhere else. And

we're finally beginning to understand around the world, I think, that the only way my children or grandchildren or any child or grandchild anywhere on this planet is going to be able to have a peaceful, stable and sustainable world is if every child has that. The G8 hasn't got that yet.

AG: Explain what the Group of Eight are.

JP: Well, the Group of Eight are the wealthiest countries in the world, and basically they run the world. And the leader is the United States, and it's actually the corporations within these companies—countries, excuse me—that run it. It's not the governments because, after all, the governments serve at the pleasure of the corporations. In our own country, we know that the next two final presidential candidates, Republican and Democrat alike, are each going to have to raise something like half a billion dollars. And that's not going to come from me and you. Primarily that's going to come from the people who own and run our big corporations. They're totally beholden to the government. So the G8, really, is this group of countries that represent the biggest multinational corporations in the world and really serve at their behest.

And what we're seeing now in Europe—and we're seeing it very strongly in Latin America, in the Middle East—is this huge undercurrent of resistance, of protest, against this empire that's been built out of this. And it's been such a subtle empire that people haven't been aware of it, because it wasn't built by the military. It was built by economic hit men. Most of us aren't aware of it.

Most Americans have no idea that these incredible lifestyles that we all lead are because we're part of a very vicious empire that literally enslaves people around the world, misuses people. But we're beginning to understand this. And the Europeans and the Latin Americans are at the forefront

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of this understanding.

ECONOMIC HIT MEN IN LATIN AMERICA

AG: Let's talk back, going to Latin America, about this Chevron–Texaco lawsuit.

JP: Well, that's extremely significant. When I was sent to Ecuador as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1968, Texaco had just gone into Ecuador, and the promise to the Ecuadorian people at that time from Texaco and their own politicians and the World Bank was "Oil is going to pull this country out of poverty". And people believed it. I believed it at the time. The exact opposite has happened. Oil has made the country much more impoverished, while Texaco has made fortunes off this. It's also destroyed vast areas of the Amazon rainforest.

So the lawsuit today that's being brought by a New York lawyer—Steve Donziger, here in New York—and some Ecuadorian lawyers is for \$6 billion, the largest environmental lawsuit in the history of the world, in the name of 30,000 Ecuadorian people against Texaco, which is now owned by Chevron, for dumping over 18 billion gallons of toxic waste into the Ecuadorian rainforest. That's 30 times more than the *Exxon Valdez* [oil spill disaster]. And dozens and dozens of people have died and are continuing to die of cancer and other pollution-related diseases in this area of the Amazon. So all this oil has come out of this area, and it's the poorest area of one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. And the irony of that is just so amazing.

But what I think is one of the really significant things about this, Amy, is that this law firm has taken this on, not *pro bono*, but they expect if they win the case, which they expect to do, to make a lot of money out of it, which is a philosophical decision. It isn't because they wanted to get rich off this. It's because they want to encourage other law firms to do similar things in Nigeria and in Indonesia and in Bolivia, in Venezuela and many other places. So they want to see a business grow out of this, of law firms going in and defending poor people, knowing that they can get a payoff from the big companies who have acted so terribly, terribly, terribly irresponsibly in the past.

And Steve Donziger, the attorney, an American attorney with very good credentials...I was in Ecuador with him just two weeks ago, and one of the very touching things he said was: "I've seen a lot of companies make mistakes and then try to defend themselves in law courts."

And he said: "That's one thing. But in this case, Texaco didn't make mistakes. This was done with intent. They knew what they were doing. To save a few bucks, they killed a lot of people."

And now they're going to be forced to pay for that, to take responsibility for that, and hopefully open the door to make many companies take responsibility for the wanton destruction that's occurred.

AG: Let's talk about Latin America and its leaders, like Jaime Roldós. Talk about him and his significance. You wrote about him in your first book, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*.

JP: Yeah, Jaime Roldós was an amazing man. After many years of military dictators in Ecuador—US puppet dictators—there was a democratic election and one man, Jaime Roldós, ran on a platform that said Ecuadorian resources ought to be used to help the Ecuadorian people—and specifically oil, which at that time was just coming in. This was in the late '70s. And I was sent to Ecuador, and I was also sent at the same time to Panama to work with Omar Torrijos, to bring these men around, to corrupt them...change their minds.

You know, in the case of Jaime Roldós, he won the election by a landslide, and now he started to put into action his policy, his promises, and was going to tax the oil companies. If they weren't willing to give much more of their profits back to the Ecuadorian people, then he threatened to nationalise them. So I was sent down, along with other economic hit men—I played a fairly minor role in that case and a major one in Panama with Torrijos—but we were sent into these countries to get these men to change their policies, to go against their own campaign promises.

And basically what you do is you tell them: "Look, you know, if you play our game, I can make you and your family very healthy. I can make sure that you get very rich. If you *don't* play our game, if you follow your campaign promises, you may go the way of Allende in Chile or Arbenz in Guatemala or Lumumba in the Congo." On and on—we can list all these presidents that we've either overthrown or assassinated because they didn't play our game. But Jaime would not come around, Jaime Roldós.

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He stayed incorruptible, as did Omar Torrijos. From an economic hit man perspective, this was very disturbing, because not only did I know I was likely to fail at my job but I knew that, if I failed, something dire was going to happen: the jackals would come in, and they would either overthrow these men or assassinate them. And in both cases, these men were assassinated, I have no doubt. They died in airplane crashes two months apart from each other in 1981: single plane—their own private planes crashed.

AG: Explain more of what happened with Omar Torrijos.

JP: Well, Omar, again, was very stalwartly standing up to the United States, demanding that the Panama Canal should be owned by Panamanians. And I spent a lot of time with Torrijos, and I liked him very, very much as an individual. He was extremely charismatic, extremely courageous and very nationalistic about wanting to get the best for his people. And I couldn't corrupt him. I tried everything I could possibly do to bring him around. And as I

was failing, I was also very concerned that something would happen to him. And sure enough—it was interesting that Jaime Roldós's plane crashed in May, and Torrijos got his family together and said: "I'm probably next, but I'm ready to go. We've now got the Canal turned over." He had signed a treaty with Jimmy Carter to get the Canal in Panamanian hands. He said: "I've accomplished my job, and I'm ready to go now." And he had a dream about being in a plane that hit a mountain. And within two months after it happened to Roldós, it happened to Torrijos also.

AG: And you met with both these men?

JP: Yes, I'd met with both of them.

AG: What were your conversations like?

JP: Well, especially with Torrijos, I spent a lot of time with him in some formal meetings and also at cocktail parties and barbecues—he was big on things like that—and was constantly trying to get him to come around to our side and letting him know that if he did, he and his family would get some very lucrative contracts, would become very wealthy, and, you know, warning him. And he didn't really need much warning, because he knew what would be likely to happen if he didn't. And his attitude was:

"I want to get done what I can in my lifetime, and then so be it."

And it's been interesting, Amy, that since I wrote the book *Confessions*... Marta Roldós, who's Jaime's daughter, has come to the United States to meet with me, and I just spent time with her in Ecuador. She is now a member of parliament in Ecuador, just elected, and she married Omar Torrijos's nephew. And it's really interesting to hear their stories about what was going on—she was seventeen at the time her parents died; her mother was also in the plane, and the two of them died in that plane—and then to hear her talk about how her husband, Omar's nephew, was in that meeting when the family was called together and Omar said: "I'm probably next, but I'm ready to go. I've done my job. I've done what I could do for my people. So I'm ready to go, if that's what has to happen."

AG: So, what were your conversations at the time with other so-called economic hit men? I mean, you became the chief [economist] at Charles Main.

JP: Right. Well, you know, when I was with other people—we

could be sitting at a table, say, in the Hotel Panama, knowing that we're both here to win these guys over, but we also had our official jobs, which were to do studies on the economy to show how, if the country accepted the loan, it was going to improve its gross national product...

So we were producing these economic reports that would prove to the World Bank and to Omar Torrijos that if he accepted these huge loans then his country's gross national product would just mushroom and pull his people out of poverty. And we produced these reports which made sense from a mathematical econometric standpoint. In fact, it often happened with these loans that the GNP, the gross national product, *did* increase.

But what also was true—and what Omar knew and Jaime Roldós knew and I was coming to know very strongly—was that, even if the general economy increased, the poor people with these loans would get poorer. The rich would make all the money, because most of the poor people weren't even tied in to the gross national product. A lot of them didn't even make income. They were living off subsistence farming. They benefited from nothing, but they were left holding the debt, and because of these huge debts their country in the long term would not be able to provide them with health care, education and other social services.

CHEAP COLTAN AND DEATH IN THE CONGO

AG: Talk about Congo.

JP: Oh, boy. The whole story of Africa and the Congo is such a devastating and sad one. And it's the hidden story, really. We in the United States don't even talk about Africa; we don't think about Africa. Congo has something called coltan, which probably most of your listeners may not even have heard of but every cellphone and laptop computer has coltan in it.

And several million people in the last few years in the Congo have been killed over coltan, because you and I and all of us in the G8 countries want to see our computers and our cellphones inexpensive. And of course, the companies that make these sell them on that basis, that "Oh, here, mine's \$200 less than the other company's". But in order to do that, these people in the Congo are being enslaved. The miners, the people mining coltan—they're being killed. There are these vast wars going on to provide us with cheap coltan.

And I have to say, you know, if we want to live in a safe world, we need to, we must be willing to, and in fact we must demand that we pay higher prices for things like laptop computers and cellphones and that a good share of that money go back to the people who are mining the coltan. And that's true of oil. It's true of so many resources that we are not paying the true cost, and there are millions of people around the world suffering from that. Roughly 50,000 people die every single day from hunger or hunger-related diseases and curable diseases that they don't get the medicines for, simply because they're part of a system that demands that they put in long hours and they get very, very low pay, so we can have things cheaper in this country. And the Congo is an incredibly potent example of that.

WARS AND THE CORPORATOCRACY

AG: You talk about the so-called defeats in Vietnam and Iraq and what they mean for corporations.

JP: Yeah, well...we, you and I, look at them as defeats, perhaps, and certainly anybody who lost a child or a sibling or a spouse in these countries looks at them as disasters, as defeats, but the corporations made a huge amount of money off Vietnam—the military industry, huge corporations, the construction companies. And, of course, they're doing it in a very, very big way in Iraq. So the corporatocracy, the people that are in fact insisting that our young men and women continue to go to Iraq and fight, they're making a tremendous amount of money. These are not failures for them; they're successes from a very strong economic standpoint. And I know that sounds cynical. I am cynical about these things. I've been there. I've seen it. And, you know, we must learn not to put up with that any more. All of us.

AG: It's the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Israeli-Arab war. You talk about Israel being a "Fortress America" in the Middle East.

JP: I think it's very sad and very telling, once again, that the Israeli people, for the most part, are led to believe that they've been given this land as a pay-off, basically, for the Holocaust, because they deserve to be recompensed. And, of course, the Holocaust was terrible, and they do deserve to be taken care of and recompensed and have stability. But why would we locate that place in the middle of the Arab world, their traditional enemies? Why would we locate that place in such an unstable area? It's because it is serving as a huge fortress for us in the biggest oil fields known in the world today, and we knew this when Israel was located there...

So, in fact, we built this vast military base, armed camp, in the middle of the Middle Eastern oilfields that are surrounded by the Arab communities, and in the process we've obviously created a tremendous amount of resentment and anger and a situation where it's very difficult to see any positive outcome there. But the fact of the matter is: our having this military base in Israel has

been a huge defence for us. It's been a place where we could really launch attacks, rely on. It's been our equivalent of the crusaders' castles in the Middle East. And it's very, very sad. I think it's extremely sad for the Israeli people that they're caught up in all of this. I think it's extremely sad for the American people. It's extremely sad for the world that this is going on.

AG: As we crisscross the globe, John Perkins, which is exactly what you did in your years as an international consultant, having been groomed by the National Security Agency but then becoming a top economist in an international consulting firm, you have also written books about shamanism. You also write about Tibet. Where does Tibet fit into this picture?

JP: Well, you know, I was just in Tibet a couple of years ago, and it was an interesting thing because I took a group of about 30 people into Tibet with me as part of a non-profit organisation... Of course, Tibet right now is very depressing because the Chinese presence is extremely strong and you see how the Tibetan culture has been put down. And you're always aware that there are Chinese

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soldiers and spies all around you. Many of the people on the trip came to the realisation that this is terrible here. "Free Tibet"—we all know about that; but the ones who had been with me on a trip to the Amazon, where the oil companies and our own military are doing the same things, said: "But doesn't this remind us of what we're doing in so much of the world?" It's something we tend to forget.

We can all wave banners about "Free Tibet", which we should, but how about freeing the countries that are under our thumb, too? I hate to say it this way, because some people might disagree with me, but I think Iraq is in worse shape than Tibet is these days, although both of them are in pretty bad shape. But so, what we saw in Tibet is that same kind of model that we're implementing around the world. And yet, most Americans are not aware that we're doing it. They're aware that the Chinese are doing it, but not aware that *we're* doing it on actually a much bigger level than the Chinese are.

SEEING THE LIGHT

AG: John, talk about your transformation. You were making a lot of money. You were travelling the world. You were in a position where you were meeting presidents and prime ministers of countries, bringing them to their knees. What made you change and then, ultimately, make the decision to write about it?

JP: You know, Amy, when I first got started, I grew up with 300, 400 years of Yankee Calvinism in New Hampshire and Vermont, with very strong moral principles; came from a pretty conservative Republican family. And all during the 10 years that I was an economic hit man, from '71 to '81, I was pretty young, but it bothered my conscience. And yet, everybody was telling me I was doing the right thing. Like you said, presidents of countries, the president of the World Bank, Robert McNamara, patted me on the back. I was asked to lecture at Harvard and many other places about what I was doing. And what I was doing was not illegal—should be, but it isn't. And yet, in my heart, it always tore at my conscience. I'd been a Peace Corps volunteer. I saw. As time went by and I began to understand more and more, it got to be more and more difficult for me to continue doing this. I had a staff of about four dozen people working for me. Things were building up.

Then, one day I was on vacation, sailing in the Virgin Islands, and I anchored my little boat off St John Island and I took the dinghy in [to shore] and climbed this mountain...up to this old sugar cane plantation in ruins. It was beautiful. Bougainvillea. The Sun was setting. I sat there and felt very peaceful. And then suddenly I realised that this plantation had been built on the bones of thousands of slaves. And then I realised that the whole hemisphere had been built on the bones of millions of slaves. I got very angry and sad. And then it suddenly struck me that I was continuing that same process and that I was a slaver, that I was making the same thing happen in a slightly...in a different way, more subtle way, but just as bad in terms of its outcome. At that point, I made the decision I would never do it again. And I went back to Boston a couple of days later and quit.

AG: So, you quit, but that was one step. Writing about it was another. Talk about your attempts over time.

JP: Oh, yes. After I quit, I tried several times to write the book that became *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* and, each time I reached out to other economic hit men I had worked with or jackals to try to get their stories, word got out and I was threatened. I had a

young daughter at the time. She's now twenty-five. And I also was offered some bribes. In fact, I accepted a bribe of about half a million dollars. It's what's called a "legal bribe", but it's a bribe, and it was given to me with the condition that I not write the book. There was no question about that. I describe it in detail.

I assuaged my guilt by putting a lot of that money into non-profits I had formed—Dream Change and Pachamama Alliance—that are helping Amazonian people fight oil companies. But I didn't write the story. This happened a number of times, and I would find one excuse or another, and I wrote other books about indigenous people. I worked with these people. I wrote the books you mentioned earlier about shamanism and so forth...

And then, on 9/11, I was in the Amazon with the Shuar people. I had taken a group of people from a non-profit in to learn from indigenous people in the Amazon. But shortly after that, I came up to New York to Ground Zero, and as I stood there looking down into that terrible pit, that smouldering pit, and it still smelled of burning flesh, I realised that I had to write the book—I could no longer defer

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it; the American people had no understanding of why so many people around the world are angry and frustrated and terrified—and that I had to take responsibility for what happened at 9/11. In fact, we all have to take a certain responsibility, which is not in any way to condone mass murder by anybody, ever—I'm not condoning that in any way—but I did realise that the American people needed to understand why there's so much anger around the world. I had to write the book.

So this time I didn't tell anyone I was writing it, and even my wife and daughter knew I was writing something but didn't know what. I didn't reach out to other people. It made it a little more difficult to write it. But finally I got it in the hands of a very good New York agent and he sent it out to publishers. At that point, this manuscript becomes my best insurance policy, as if something strange happens to me, including now, suddenly the book will sell. Even though it's been a bestseller for a long time, it will sell a lot more copies, if... People sometimes laugh and say, "Do you worry that your publisher may be trying to assassinate you, because it would certainly help book sales?" I don't worry about it. So at that point, once I got the manuscript there, it became my insurance policy.

ASSASSINS AND COUPS

AG: You write "a jackal is born" about Jack Corbin. Who is he?

JP: Well, Jack Corbin—and that's not his real name, but he's a real person—is alive and well today, working for us in Iraq. But he is a jackal, he is an assassin. And one of the most fascinating stories, I think, involves Seychelles, which is a small country, an island country, off the coast of Africa. And it happens to be located near Diego Garcia, one of the United States's most strategic air bases.

There's a long history behind Diego Garcia. But in the late '70s, Seychelles had a president who was very friendly to us, James Mancham, and he was overthrown in a bloodless coup by [France-Albert] René, a socialist. And René threatened to get us out of Diego Garcia, to expose the real facts behind the terrible things that went on to put us in Diego Garcia. There's a lot of details that I won't get into now...

AG: Also, Diego Garcia is very significant as a military base.

JP: Extremely significant. And it was used—it's being used—in Afghanistan and Iraq and sorties that we fly in to Africa or any part

of that world. In any case, I was called off the job, and a little while later a team of assassins were sent in from South Africa—forty-five, forty-six, I can't remember the exact number, were sent in as a rugby team to bring in Christmas gifts to children of the Seychelles, but their real job was to overthrow the government and assassinate René. At the time, I didn't know these individuals. Now, I know Jack Corbin. I know him very well, personally. I've met him since. Our paths crossed back then, but we didn't know each other.

AG: What exactly did he do?

JP: Well, the team went in, and they were apprehended at the airport. A security guard discovered a hidden weapon on one of them. A huge gun battle broke out at the Mahi airport, and these mercenaries were surrounded by perhaps a thousand soldiers on the outside. Jack told me it was one of the few times in his life where he figured he was going to die and had time to think about it. Many times he could have died, but he just reacted quickly. And they didn't know what to do, but eventually an Air India 707 came into view and asked permission to land, and [was given] permission to land. As soon as it landed, they hijacked it and they flew it back to Durban, South Africa.

This was now on US national news, and...I didn't know what was going to happen when I was called off the case, but now I'm seeing it unfold. And to the world, what we saw was that this plane flies into Durban, South Africa, surrounded by South African security guards. The men on the plane give themselves up. They march off. They're sent to court and then sentenced to prison, and some, I think, to execution, and that's the end of the story as far as we know.

Now that I know Jack, what actually happened was when the plane was surrounded, the security forces got on the telephone with the plane and discovered there were their good friend—their teachers in fact—on the plane. They worked out a deal. The men gave themselves up. They did spend three months in prison. They had their own wing with television, etc., and then were quietly released after three months. A lot of those same men, that team, today are in Iraq working for us there, doing things that, you know, our soldiers are forbidden from doing. And they're making very good money doing it.

AG: Who is this man, Jack Corbin, working for today in Iraq?

JP: Well, he works for a private company in Iraq that has a contract, you know, that comes through the Pentagon, CIA, one of those organisations. So, like so much of this work, there's a tremendous number of these mercenaries there, as you've reported on this program. Jack Corbin and his people are at the very top of that level. They're the extremely skilled ones who do the really delicate work. We've also got a lot of people working for Blackwater and others that, you know, are not quite as skilled and are just out there doing kind of the grunt work. But there are all kinds at that level.

CREATING CORPORATE CITIZENS

AG: John Perkins, what do you see as the solutions right now?

JP: Well, Amy, this empire that we've created really has an emperor, and it's not the president of this country. The president serves for a short period of time, but it doesn't really matter whether we have a Democrat or a Republican in the White House or running Congress: the empire goes on because it's really run by what I call

the corporatocracy, which is a group of men who run our biggest corporations. This isn't a conspiracy theory. They don't need to conspire. They all know what serves their best interest. But they really are the equivalent of the emperor because they do not serve at the wish of the people, they're not democratically elected, they don't serve any limited term. They essentially answer to no one except their own boards, and most corporate CEOs actually run their boards, rather than the other way around. And they are the power behind this. And so, if we want to turn this around, we have to impact them very strongly, which means that we have to change the corporations, which is their power base. Today corporations exist for the primary purpose of making large profits, making a few very rich people a lot richer on a quarterly basis, on a daily basis, on a very short-term basis... There is no reason for that to be.

Corporations have been defined as individuals. Individuals have to be good citizens. Corporations need to be good citizens. Their primary goal must be to take care of their employees, their customers and all the people around the world who provide the

resources that go into making this world run, and to take care of the environments and the communities where those people live.

We must get the corporations to redefine themselves, and I think it's very realistic that we can do so. Every corporate executive out there is smart enough to realise that he's running a very failed system... It has to change. Corporate executives know that... I believe that they want to see change... We must convince them that their corporations need to be institutions to make this a better world, rather than

institutions that serve a few very rich people and whose goal is to make those people even richer.

We need to turn this around. *We must.*

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AG: I want to ask one last quick question on Ecuador. Ecuador's defence minister Guadalupe Larriva died in a helicopter crash near the Manta US Air Base installation [on 24 January]. Do you know anything about that?

JP: Well, yeah. I just came from Ecuador and everybody is talking about it, because the same thing happened to Jaime Roldós's minister of defence before he [Roldós] was assassinated. The fact that it happened next to the US Air Base in Manta and it was a freak crash, two helicopters colliding, and with the similarities with what happened to Jaime Roldós—people all through Ecuador are saying this was a warning to Rafael Correa, the new President of Ecuador.

AG: We're going to have to leave it there. John Perkins, thanks for joining us. John Perkins's new book is called *The Secret History of the American Empire: Economic Hit Men, Jackals, and the Truth about Global Corruption*.

Editor's Note:

This is an abridged, edited version of Amy Goodman's interview with John Perkins for *Democracy Now!* radio and television. For the complete transcript, go to <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/06/05/149254>. John Perkins's book *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* was reviewed in NEXUS 12/06. His essay on the dark side of globalisation was published in *A Game As Old As Empire*, reviewed in NEXUS 14/04. His new book *The Secret History of the American Empire* is reviewed in this edition.

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